National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

Vulnerability of eco-environmental health to climate change: The views of government stakeholders and other specialists in Queensland, Australia

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: There is overwhelming scientific evidence that human activities have changed and will continue to change the climate of the Earth. Eco-environmental health, which refers to the interdependencies between ecological systems and population health and well-being, is likely to be significantly influenced by climate change. The aim of this study was to examine perceptions from government stakeholders and other relevant specialists about the threat of climate change, their capacity to deal with it, and how to develop and implement a framework for assessing vulnerability of eco-environmental health to climate change. METHODS: Two focus groups were conducted in Brisbane, Australia with representatives from relevant government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the industry sector (n Euro Surveillance (Bulletin Europeen Sur Les Maladies Transmissibles; European Communicable Disease Bulletin) 15) involved in the discussions. The participants were specialists on climate change and public health from governmental agencies, industry, and non-governmental organisations in South-East Queensland. RESULTS: The specialists perceived climate change to be a threat to eco-environmental health and had substantial knowledge about possible implications and impacts. A range of different methods for assessing vulnerability were suggested by the participants and the complexity of assessment when dealing with multiple hazards was acknowledged. Identified factors influencing vulnerability were perceived to be of a social, physical and/or economic nature. They included population growth, the ageing population with associated declines in general health and changes in the vulnerability of particular geographical areas due to for example, increased coastal development, and financial stress. Education, inter-sectoral collaboration, emergency management (e.g. development of early warning systems), and social networks were all emphasised as a basis for adapting to climate change. To develop a framework, different approaches were discussed for assessing eco-environmental health vulnerability, including literature reviews to examine the components of vulnerability such as natural hazard risk and exposure and to investigate already existing frameworks for assessing vulnerability. CONCLUSION: The study has addressed some important questions in regard to government stakeholders and other specialists' views on the threat of climate change and its potential impacts on eco-environmental health. These findings may have implications in climate change and public health decision-making.

Source: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2919479

Resource Description

Communication: ☒

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change;

surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Health Professional, Policymaker, Researcher

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Unspecified Exposure

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Australasia

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

General Health Impact

Medical Community Engagement:

resource focus on how the medical community discusses or acts to address health impacts of climate change

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Policy/Opinion, Research Article

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified